

THOUGHTS
ON
BRITISH COLONIAL SLAVERY.

BY THE

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IT may be a question whether the contrariety between the Christian religion and West Indian Slavery has been sufficiently insisted upon. The inhumanity, the impolicy, the cruelty, the injustice, involved in our present slave-system, have been exposed; but, perhaps, not the directly antichristian spirit of it,—its opposition to all the principles and obligations of the religion of love. At least this view of it has not been dwelt upon with the force which its paramount importance demands. For if there be any one thing which characterises the religion of Christ, it is the tenderness which it inspires. Its foundations were laid in love—the love of God, our heavenly Father, towards lost mankind—the love of Jesus Christ, our blessed Lord, in dying a sacrifice upon the cross for us. Even infidels allow that the meek and peaceful spirit of Christianity, and especially the character of our Lord, is pure and lovely. In fact, the distinguishing badge of the religion of Christ—that by which all men are to know that we are his disciples, is LOVE. It is the boast of Christianity that she has diffused a spirit of kindness amongst mankind—that she has mitigated the horrors of war—abolished the gladiatorial spectacles—ameliorated the treatment of captives—introduced hospitals and infirmaries for the sick—banished infanticide—improved the condition of the laborious classes—set apart one day in seven for the

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repose of the body and the instruction of the mind—softened the administration of absolute governments—changed, in short, the aspect of the countries where it has prevailed.

How comes it to pass, then, that upon 800,000 subjects of the British empire, the most burdensome of all yokes should still be permitted to press? How comes it to pass that Christianity has not abolished the slavery in the West Indies, as it triumphed over the slavery established in the Roman Empire? The answer is, that Christianity has never been brought to bear upon the question in the way that it should, and that it must, before the evil will be abated. Christians have not yet fully considered the absolute unlawfulness of the present state of slavery to every man who calls himself by the name of Christ.

It was late in the eighteenth century before the public attention was effectually called to the condition of our slaves, and the horrors of the traffic by which their numbers were supplied. The first great object of the friends of Africa was to obtain the abolition of the trade itself. During the twenty years exhausted in that contest, the attention of the public was not directed so immediately to the opposition of slavery to the Christian religion, as to the atrocities of the trade between Africa and the West Indies—to the terrific cruelties of the middle passage—to the miseries of the captivity in which it terminated—to the impolicy of pursuing so fatal a traffic—to the beneficial effects which its abolition might produce on the condition of the slaves. Much time was also of necessity consumed in establishing, by irresistible evidence, the facts on which the various parts of the case rested. It has only been within the last five years that the attention of parliament has been called, distinctly, to the question of the mitigation and gradual abolition of West Indian Slavery itself. The time is still more recent since it has been established by undeniable facts, that no material improvement of the system of slavery can be expected from the slave farmers and the colonial assemblies in the West Indies. Now, at length, the whole case stands out clear and prominent. The solemn act of justice which is to vindicate the oppressed and injured African race, must proceed from the mother country—from the general feelings of Englishmen—from the effects of decided public sentiment upon the parliament and the government. Nor can this be brought about, except as the irreconcilable hostility of the Christian religion to the dreadful evil of negro slavery is fully and strongly

shewn. This will awaken the public conscience. This will shake us from the torpor which is apt to creep upon the mind after we have become familiarized with the terms and statements of a great question.

Nothing then can be more directly contrary to the whole spirit of Christianity than the inhuman and horrible system of slavery. If one act of injustice, wilfully committed, is inconsistent with the character of a Christian, what must be ten thousand? If one injured and oppressed fellow-creature cries against us for redress to the Father of mercies, and cries not in vain, what will not the cry of thousands upon thousands effect? If an occasional deed of cruelty, prompted by passion, is a provocation in the eyes of a gracious Father, what must a cool, deliberate system of cruelty be? If crimes affecting the health or property of another, though ever so partially, be a breach of the divine commandments, what must injuries be, affecting the liberty—the whole future well-being—the family—the children—of hundreds of thousands of innocent fellow-creatures consigned to hopeless slavery?

Do we remember what are the plain broad facts of the case? Is it not unquestionable that the West Indian slaves now in our colonies, were obtained by the fraudulent and unjust rapacity of the slave traffic? Thus the first possession rests on an act of injustice, which every subsequent day of captivity continues and aggravates. The English slave owner has no more right, in the eye of religion, to retain in bondage the unoffending African, than an African slave-owner would have to retain a number of Englishmen, if he had made an incursion on our coast and had carried off our peasants with their wives and children. The poverty, the ignorance, the uncivilized state of Africa, its inability to cope with our force and detect our fraud, only aggravate our enormous guilt; and aggravate it in the exact ratio of our superior knowledge, attainments, power, and advancement in the arts of life.

What, again, are the facts as to the condition of these poor slaves, when landed on the West India Islands? Are they treated like men—like fellow-creatures—like brothers? Are they instructed in the Christian religion? Is the Sabbath allowed them as the day of repose and peace? Is the institution of marriage encouraged? Is their labour moderated by their strength? Are their chains softened and lightened by the general kindness of their masters? Are they placed under the equal protection of the laws? Are the tender bonds of domestic

charity respected and preserved? Do they make advances in religion, social order, happiness? Do their numbers increase according to the usual progress of population in other countries? The answer to every one of these questions, is—NO.

Our fellow-creatures, our brethren in blood, they are treated as beasts of burden—are delivered over to the absolute will of a slave-driver—are compelled, in gangs, to their daily work—to their excessive and overwhelming toil by the cart-whip—are exposed to punishments the most cruel and debasing, at the passion and caprice of another—are branded in the flesh with hot irons—are sold as goods and chattels for the payment of their masters' debts—are separated, the one part of their families from another, and sold to distant owners—are debarred from religious instructions by the Sabbath being the market day, and the chief time allotted for cultivating the patches of land by which they support themselves—marriage almost unknown—cruel punishments and overworking, especially in crop-time, with the constant effect of indiscriminate licentiousness, lessening their numbers—their testimony not received in courts of law—their possession of property unprotected—the purchase of their liberty made almost impossible! Thus man is the prey of man. The innocent African, first taken from the land of his fathers, is pursued by unrelenting barbarity through his shortened term of life, to a death unrelieved by the Christian's hope.

And all this is done by Englishmen—by the professors of that religion which says, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.* And all this is done by those who acknowledge the Bible to be the word of God, who read the continual woes pronounced by the Prophets against those who oppress and do unjustly—woes which fill the sacred page, and which ended in the Babylonish captivity. All this is done by the followers of that Jesus who came to proclaim peace, and mercy, and love; who wept at the grave of Lazarus; who denounced his heaviest threatenings against the oppression and cruelties of the Scribes and Pharisees; and who accomplished his sacrifice upon the cross to redeem all mankind, and break down all differences of race, and teach us that *in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*

All this is done, again, by those who read the second great command-

ment of the law, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*; who join, in words in the prayer of the Psalmist, *Let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before thee*; who hear the Apostle's command, *Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that you also have a master in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him*—who hear his exhortation, *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep; Remember those that are in bonds, as bound with them, and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body*—who hear him class *men-stealers*, with *murderers of fathers, and murderers of mothers*—and who read his affectionate language concerning Onesimus, a run-away slave, whom he had begotten to the Christian faith at Rome, as *not any longer a servant, but above a servant; a brother beloved, specially to me*, says the Apostle to his correspondent Philemon, *but how much more to thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord; if thou count me therefore as a partner, receive him as myself.*

All this is done, finally, by those who profess to believe that at the last solemn day, when masters and slaves will stand before the same tribunal of Christ, works of mercy will be especially produced as the proofs of faith and love.—*For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*

And what increases the guilt, all this is supported by a systematic opposition to reform in the Colonial assemblies—by an artful and industrious concealment and perversion of facts, false representations and colourable excuses—by a pertinacity and folly which the authority of the King and the resolutions of the British parliament in vain attempt to subdue; and by an infatuation, which bears along the West Indian body in blindly defending a system in open hostility with every principle of humanity, with every view of just policy, and with every dictate of religion. But this seems the natural effect of great crimes. Obduracy is the just infliction which follows habits of such a character.

It remains for a free and religious nation like England to look the dreadful evil in the face, and to devise the efficacious remedy.

I do not stay to answer the objection that the Christian religion tolerates such a slavery as prevails in our Colonies, because the Jewish law

modified the domestic bondage of early times, and stripped it of its most fearful characteristics—an objection which is the strongest possible confutation of itself. Nor do I condescend to refute the cavil, that, because the Apostles enjoined obedience on the first converts who were of the class of slaves, and commanded them to be faithful to their masters, (which Christianity now does, oppressed as the negro slave is,) therefore the injunctions of mercy, and justice, and kindness, on masters and princes, and legislators, (which would at once unloose the chains which we so much abhor) are null and void! Nor can I with patience hear the unworthy sophism, that because Christianity and some sort of bondage have co-existed since the first promulgation of the gospel, therefore, the most cruel and inhuman species of slavery ever known, admits of apology as not inconsistent with the Christian faith. Christianity is indignant at such an insinuation. As well might all the vices and evils which have co-existed with Christianity because men have not received and obeyed her precepts, be imputed to her as their defender and patron.

No; the only real patron of West Indian Slavery, is torpor and selfishness of heart, false views of policy, fear of the power and wealth of the West Indian body, the revenue—the blood-stained revenue—raised from the importation of Colonial produce—the ignorance in which our carelessness leaves so many Englishmen of the horrid facts of the case—and the backwardness of man to discharge a duty towards an absent and unprotected class of sufferers.

But these subterfuges are fast disappearing. The public mind is more and more aroused. The indignation of a generous people will not suffer much longer the greatest instance of oppression to go unredressed. The rising principles of true Christianity will pervade our legislature and our government. The fear of the divine wrath for a great national sin, will overbalance the false fears of man, and the false calculations of a short-sighted policy. England will awake to its duty. All due consideration, indeed, will be given to the actual situation of our slave population, and the just interests of the slave owners and merchants; but the main duty of mitigating the condition of the present generation, and preparing for the manumission of the next, will be efficaciously discharged. And the country, which is multiplying its missions, and circulating its bibles ABROAD, will no longer be reproached with the mon-

strous inconsistency of neglecting nearly a million of its subjects in its own colonies AT HOME.

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun ; and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter ; and on the side of their oppressors there was power ; but they had no comforter, Eccl. iv. 1.

If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain ; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not ; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it ? And he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it ? And shall not he render to every man according to his works ? Prov. xxiv. 11, 12.

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